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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 002282

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SUBJECT: RRT ERBIL: KRG CONVENES NEW PARLIAMENT BUT
OPPOSITION LEADERS STAY AWAY

BAGHDAD 00002282 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: RRT Erbil Team Leader Andrew Snow

[11](#). (U) This is an RRT Erbil cable.

[12](#). (C) Summary: At a ceremony in Erbil August 20, the newly-elected Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) parliament was sworn in and President Barzani inaugurated. Barzani and President Talabani strongly condemned the Baghdad bombings and called for Iraqi unity. With the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) having completed their negotiations on power-sharing, Barham Salih will soon form the next regional government as Prime Minister, and nominated KDP Kamal Kirkuki to be KRG,s parliamentary leader. Both the incoming and outgoing parliamentary leaders defended the proposed KRG constitution, inferring that KRG leaders may intend to revive it. Change List and other opposition leaders did not attend the ceremony, nor did the opposition nominate candidates for parliamentary leadership positions, in part because of distrust between the two opposition lists. The bombings and the opposition leaders, absence took some of the luster off the KRG leaders, celebration. The Change List top leaders, decision to boycott participation at the regional level and only concern themselves with preparation for provincial elections demonstrates a lack of commitment to change, and a desire for a consolidation of power at the local level. End Summary.

Ceremony to Inaugurate KRG President and Convene Parliament:

[13](#). (SBU) Following the KRG Court of Cassation,s disposition of the election complaint cases, the KRG swooped into action to pull together on short notice a splashy ceremony that would combine inauguration of President Barzani with the convening of the new parliament. The ceremony was held on August 20 in the Erbil convention center with the KRG providing a plane to bring GOI and diplomatic representatives from Baghdad. Although Baghdad-based GOI and diplomats downgraded their representation because of the August 19 bombings, President Talabani attended. Other dignitaries included former U.S. Ambassador Khalilzad, the UK and Brazilian Ambassadors, Deputy Chief of Mission Ford and parliamentarians from the Council of Representative (COR). Kamal Kirkuki (KDP) was installed as the new Parliamentary leader, replacing Adnan Mufti (PUK), who told RRToffs he will work on party activities in the PUK politburo.

KDP and PUK Seal Power-Sharing Agreement:

[12](#). (C) Even though the KDP and PUK agreed last January to replace Nechirvan Barzani with Barham Salih, PUK,s poor showing in the KRG elections had KDP contacts, including Nechirvan Barzani, insisting that nothing was agreed until

the KDP and PUK could have negotiations the week of August 16-20. (Comment: This appears in retrospect to have been posturing. End Comment) On August 19, Salih formally resigned as GOI Deputy Prime Minister. At the ceremony in Erbil he nominated KDP Kamal Kirkuki to be House Speaker. KRG officials are privately saying that Salih will only be Prime Minister for a two-year period. There is continuing speculation as to Nechirvan Barzani,s future role.

13. (SBU) Parliamentary Leader Kirkuki called a meeting for August 24 of the leaders of all the parliamentary blocs, at which it is expected that he will ask Salih, as leader of the majority list, to form a government. KRG officials say the government is expected to be far smaller than the unwieldy 44-member outgoing government with something on the order of 20 ministers.

Baghdad Bombings Condemned:
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14. (SBU) The previous day,s bombings had a sobering effect on the KRG ceremony. Outgoing parliamentary leader Adnan Mufti began the proceedings with a moment of silence for the victims. Presidents Barzani and Talabani, in their speeches, strongly condemned the attacks. Barzani spoke at some length about the bombings, offering assistance to the GOI and sympathies for the families and saying, the only response to these terrorist actions is the unity of the Iraqi people., He also made repeated references to friendship between Arabs and Kurds, and the KRG,s decision to remain a part of a federal and democratic Iraq.

15. (SBU) President Talabani, speaking in Arabic, said all Iraqis should stand against these actions, and the Iraqi people will overcome them. He also said the Kurdish people

BAGHDAD 00002282 002.2 OF 002

will play a historic role to reinforce solidarity and unity of Iraq.

KRG Draft Constitution:

16. (SBU) President Barzani, much as he does in private meetings with USG officials, stressed the importance of the Iraqi constitution, reiterating that it is the point of reference for any problems we may have. The Constitution is our weapon and it is the weapon of the Iraqi people., As for the controversial proposed KRG constitution, both the outgoing and incoming parliamentary leaders spoke about it in their speeches, with incoming leader Kirkuki insisting it was not out of line with the Iraqi constitution.

Opposition Leaders Stay Away:

17. (SBU) The top three leaders of the Change List--Nawshirwan Mustafa, Mohamed Tawfiq, and Othman Banimarani--did not attend the ceremony and were not sworn in as members of parliament. Nor did the two Islamist party leaders, Bahaddin Saladdin and Ali Bapir of the four-party Service and Reform List that won 13 seats. The two Islamist leaders were reportedly travelling in Turkey, although the secular party leaders in their alliance did attend. In addition to staying away from the ceremony, the opposition leaders chose not to nominate candidates for the posts of parliamentary leader, deputy leader and parliamentary secretary. This allowed the ruling party to elect its candidates by acclamation rather than by vote.

18. (C) Back on August 3, Mohamed Tawfiq told RRToff that Change might not even participate in parliament so as not to give credibility to an election that they believed was characterized by fraud. At the ceremony, Change List

parliamentarians, except for their top leaders, showed up and were sworn in; and Change contacts advise us that they will actively participate in parliament. However, the top three Change List leaders, in a statement to a local newspaper (and in private comments to RRT staff) said they had decided not to participate in the Iraqi Kurdistan Parliament (IKP) so as to devote themselves to reorganizing the Change List, and to prepare for COR elections and KRG Provincial Council elections including Kirkuk. This leaves the two most likely candidates to lead the Change List parliamentary bloc as Ms. Kwestan Mohamed and Dr. Shaho Said.

9.(C) Although Change contacts say privately they hope to cooperate with the Service and Reform List, both opposition lists, decision not to nominate candidates for the parliamentary leadership positions suggests the two opposition lists may have difficulty cooperating. Change List contacts tell the RRT they have doubts about the Service and Reform politicians, willingness to stand up to the ruling party, citing examples of Service and Reform caving in to intimidation in the past, or being co-opted. Moreover, there continue to be reports that the Service and Reform parties, either individually or as a group, may be negotiating with the ruling party to join the government.

¶10. (C) A politburo member of the KIU, the single largest party in Service and Reform, told RRT staff that there was an understanding between the two lists that Change List would nominate a candidate for Leader and Service and Reform would nominate a candidate for Deputy, with both lists supporting each other. The night before the ceremony, however, Change reportedly pulled out of the deal saying they would not support any candidates. Service and Reform opted not to try to nominate any candidates on its own.

Comment:

¶11. (C) Both the bombings and the opposition leaders, absence took some of the luster off what the KRG leaders had hoped would be a celebration of their victory. Although KRG leaders talked of cooperation and unity, KRG,s appointment of new House Speaker KDP hardliner Kamal Kirkuki is a contradiction. The decision of Change List leaders to boycott participation at the regional level may be a disappointment for those who voted for them and reveals their lack of commitment at the regional level and a desire for consolidation of power at the local level. Cooperation between the two opposition groups could maximize their influence in parliament, but they are off to an inauspicious start.

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